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SUBJECT: SUNNI CLERIC ON BASRAH AFTER COK, RECONSTRUCTION DELAYS,
UPCOMING ELECTIONS

REF: BASRAH 08

CLASSIFIED BY: Howell Howard, Director, Regional Embassy Office
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REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C/rel MCFI) In a meeting held on May 20 at the Basrah Regional Embassy Office, Sheikh Abd al-Karim al-Dosari, a leading Sunni cleric, discussed the improved environment in Basrah following the Charge of the Knights (COK) operation, crediting the GOI and the ISF for the instrumental role that they have played. He said that sectarian tensions have eased, with steps toward reconciliation. People still fear that the militias could return, and he warned of continued Iranian interference in Basrah. Dosari stated that the climate is advantageous for independent candidates in the provincial election, as many of Basrah's residents are frustrated by the inefficacy of the established political blocs who dominate the Provincial Council. Concerned that the established political blocs will attempt to co-opt or intimidate independent candidates, he asserted that the Iranians would do whatever they can to influence the elections. He lamented the slow pace of reconstruction in Basrah and lambasted local officials. Dosari indicated that he may run in provincial elections as either an independent or as part of a nationalist coalition. End Summary.

¶2. (C/rel MCFI) During a meeting held on May 20 at the Basrah Regional Embassy Office, Sheikh Abd al-Karim al-Dosari shared his opinions on the improved security situation in Basrah following the COK operation. Stating that the operation had produced tangible security results, he added that it has restored public confidence in the GOI and the ISF, and there is newfound sense that Iraq now has a government that is working for them. Commenting on the Iraqi Police, he said that COK "separated the good cops from the bad." He also acknowledged the important role of the tribes in COK, and he praised the CF, and in particular, the U.S., for their contributions.

¶3. (C/rel MCFI) Dosari also said that sectarian relations have improved since the COK. Though the militias were never able to completely break down relations between Sunnis and Shias, significant tensions existed and people had been afraid to openly mix with members of other sects. With the militias now on the run and unable to intimidate people, Basrawis are initiating steps towards reconciliation and dialogue. "Even the firebrands have begun to tone down their rhetoric," he claimed.

¶4. (C/rel MCFI) Despite the improved situation, Dosari said that there is a concern that the Iranian-backed militias could return to Basrah better trained and equipped, and he urged the CF to take steps to counter Iran's attempts to destabilize southern Iraq. He also shared the frustrations that many people feel about the slow pace of reconstruction in Basrah since the COK, and when asked about the \$100 million emergency reconstruction fund, Dosari simply laughed and said, "What money? Where is this money?" He then proceeded to launch into a diatribe against Basrah's local officials, dismissing them as "corrupt and incompetent."

¶5. (C/rel MCFI) Regarding the upcoming provincial elections, Dosari said that many Basrawis have a low opinion of their political leaders, many of whom are from established party blocs. Because of this, independents, nationalists, and tribes have decided to run in the upcoming elections, and he appeared confident that these groups would do well. He did caution, though, that some of the established political blocs will try to co-opt or intimidate independents, and he also warned that Iran will do everything it can to influence the results of the upcoming elections. Before concluding the meeting, Sheikh Dosari revealed that he was considering running in the upcoming provincial election as an independent or as part of a nationalist political entity comprised of Sunnis, Shia, and Christians.

¶6. (C/rel MCFI) COMMENT: Dosari is a sheikh of the Sunni Al Dawsir tribe. He has navigated the stormy religious waters to become respected by moderate Shia. His tribesmen have not made a practice of attacking Shia, nor has the Al Dawsir attacked ISF or CF. Fadhila leaders reportedly like him but the ISCI/Badr group does not. He also enjoys some protection as a representative of VP Tareq al-Hashimi and an advocate for the various Sunni municipal leaders. Ambassador Crocker met with him and several other sheikhs earlier this year. Dosari is a credible leader outside of the Shia political infighting whose opinions should be taken seriously on the slow pace of reconstruction, the solid yet fragile gains of COK and the danger posed by Iranian influence for the coming provincial election.

HOWARD